

## HR Weekly Podcast

11/9/2007

Today is November 9, 2007, and welcome to the HR Weekly Podcast from the State Office of Human Resources. This week's topic concerns reference checking of job applicants.

Background information on job applicants is obtained through various avenues. Among the most popular methods across all industries is the reference check. The most common information sought by employers through a reference check is verification of employment eligibility, criminal background, verification of former employers, verification of dates of previous employment, verification of former job titles, credit history, if relevant, and educational credentials. Successfully checking this information is often the best defense against a negligent hiring lawsuit.

By far, the majority of businesses conduct reference checks; however, many employers are reluctant to divulge reference information. Outside of dates of employment and wage history, some employers do not mention anything else for fear of lawsuits on grounds of invasion of privacy or defamation of character. In actuality, only a small percentage of employers have had legal problems with regards to reference checks. As long as the references give responses that are truthful, only job-related, and in good faith, there should be no legal recourse. In addition, the South Carolina General Assembly has enacted § 41-1-65 of the South Carolina Code of Laws that grants employers immunity from liability for disclosure of information about an employee or former employee in specific situations.

Reference checks can be conducted over the phone or through forms via mail or even email. Telephone reference checks take less time and more information is usually shared. The State's application has a section where applicants must give their signature consenting to a background or reference check. Attached to the text of this podcast on OHR's website is a list of potential reference checking questions.

The reference check is an opportunity to narrow your applicant pool based on first hand information of previous employment. If additional information is needed about the applicant, you can request that the former employer submit that information in writing.

Becoming increasingly popular among employers, in addition to more traditional background checks, is using public domain web resources. Employers are now using social networking sites, such as Myspace, Facebook, and Linked-In, to learn more about applicants. Searching an applicant's name on Google, YouTube, or Blog searches might turn up information better to assess character or leisure activities that might affect an applicant's fit into your organization. Nevertheless, information gathered on the web should not be the sole reason for a hiring decision. Also, potential information concerning race, religion, or disabilities that may be obtained on the web should not be factors in a hiring decision. Information from the web should only supplement information gathered from traditional methods of reference and background checks.

If you have any questions on reference checking, please call your H R Consultant at 737-0900.

Thank you.

### **Reference Checking Questions**

In what capacity were you associated with the candidate?

From what dates was the candidate employed? What was the candidate's position?

How would you describe the overall quality of the candidate's work? Can you give me some examples?

What were the candidate's strengths?

What would you say are the candidate's weaknesses?

How would you compare the candidate's work to the work of others who performed the same job?

In what kind of environment did the candidate work?

How much of a contribution do you think the candidate made to your company or department?

How would you describe the candidate's ability to communicate?

How does the candidate handle pressure or deadlines?

How well does the candidate get along with co-workers?

How well does the candidate get along with managers?

How well does the candidate supervise others? Can you give me your impressions of his or her management style? Describe the candidate's success in motivating subordinates.

How does the candidate handle conflict situations?

Based on the candidate's performance with your company, do you think he or she would be good in the type of position we're considering him or her for?

What motivates the candidate? How ambitious is he or she?

Would you recommend this candidate for this type of position?

For what type of work is the candidate ideally suited?

Were there any serious problems with the candidate that we need to be aware of before making a hiring decision?

Why did the candidate leave your employment?

Would you rehire this candidate?

Do you have any additional information to share with us about this candidate?